

A Model for the Many Senses of Scripture

From the Literal to the Spiritual in Genesis 22 with Thomas Aquinas

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INTRODUCTION: MANY SENSES REQUIRE MANY TRANSLATIONS

On the mountain the Lord appeared (NETS, Gen. 22:14b)

On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided (RSV)¹

In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen (KJV)

On the mountain the LORD will see (NAB)

ἐν τῷ ὄρει κύριος ὠφθη (LXX)

in monte Dominus videtur (Nova Vulgata)

in monte Dominus videbit (St. Jerome's Vulgate)

In his book *Abraham's Curse*, Bruce Chilton argues that in Gen. 22:14b, “the Septuagint’s Greek renders the Hebrew text” correctly (i.e., “with Yahweh as the subject of the verb”), whereas English translations like the King James Version (KJV) prefer to imply that the ram is the verbal subject. Chilton contends that “This is a case of translators caring more about doctrine than wording, and attempting to legislate what the Bible can say.”²

Chilton’s textual exegesis does have some value. He notes that “Contextually

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as well as grammatically, God is the subject: Yahweh ‘was seen’ on Moriah, liberating Isaac by means of divine intervention.”³ But with his polemics against the KJV, he fails to affirm the rich polysemy of the passage. He replaces one literal reading with another and then argues as if the two are at odds. But Scripture has many senses, a truth famously expressed in the medieval distich of Augustine of Dacia, best known in the version of Nicholas of Lyra: “The literal sense teaches what happened; what you believe, the allegorical; the moral, what you should do; where you are going, the anagogical.”⁴ Therefore Chilton is wrong to impute bad motives to anyone who would attempt to unfold the spiritual sense of a passage (“caring more about doctrine”), or even to anyone who would note that a passage has more than one literal meaning.

Chilton’s own insistence on uncovering the univocal original meaning of a passage (through his preferred historical method of “generative exegesis”)⁵ is excessively literal, as if recourse to grammar would allow one “to legislate what the Bible can say.” When Chilton says “Yahweh ‘was seen’ on Moriah,” he is not contending that God was seen *directly*, literally, but rather interpreting the metaphorical or parabolical sense of the phrase “Yahweh was seen” (in Gen. 22:14b), because he glosses the meaning of the metaphor as “liberating Isaac by means of divine intervention”;⁶ that is, God is seen *indirectly*, cognitively, rather than literally with the eyes. Because literally seeing a ram is not opposed to cognitively understanding God’s action, the KJV, *pace* Chilton, can be defended contextually. To my mind, the Revised Standard Version (RSV), echoing the KJV, does the best job of rendering the Hebrew text literally, with “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided,” because this leaves open the many senses of the third person singular “it,” to be unfolded by exegesis. Thus *more than one translation* is required in order to appreciate all the significations being deployed in the treatment of “seeing” in Gen. 22:8 and 22:14. “It shall be provided”: More than one univocal sense of the “it” has to be uncovered by exegesis in this Scripture, in order to see what “it” is all about.

To justify my opinion that the RSV most felicitously translates the Hebrew, I would like to prepare the way to a conclusion in which I compare the Septuagint’s translation (which follows Chilton’s preferred rendering of the context) with the Vulgate Latin translations. The path toward this conclusion will show that Chilton’s polemics, indicative of an exegetical attitude that is hostile to an appreciation of the many senses of Scripture, fail to see how the RSV translation is also defensible as keeping the reader’s mind open to the many senses of the Scriptural passage. But first things first. With the help of St. Thomas Aquinas, let me distinguish the various senses of Scripture and then point out how they are all exemplified here, all being signified by the text.

TABLE 1: A MODEL OF ST. THOMAS'S SCRIPTURE SENSES
AS APPLIED TO GENESIS 22

GENERAL SENSE	SPECIFIC SENSE	EXAMPLE IN GENESIS 22
(A) Literal	(A1) Historical	recounting the Aqedah
	(A2) Etiological	establishing worship
	(A3) Analogical	internal education
(B) Literal	Parabological, or Metaphorical	metaphor of vision
	[(B): i.e., <i>indirectly</i> literal]	(B1) see before
		(B2) see to it
		(B3) care for
(C) Spiritual	(C1) Allegorical	sacrifice's victim
	(C2) Tropological, or Moral	merciful intervention
	(C3) Anagogical	resurrection (for heavenly worship)

THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE MANY SENSES OF SCRIPTURE

At the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas famously makes a neat summary of the four senses of Scripture commemorated by Nicholas of Lyra:⁷ the literal and then the three spiritual senses, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. What is less often appreciated is, first, how Thomas in this article also says that there is *not just one* sense of the literal and, second, how the different senses of the literal that he does distinguish are related to the spiritual. If one reads the article carefully, Thomas is seen distinguishing *multiple senses* of Scripture, which I enumerate in the table above (and organize according to a threefold pattern that I find suggested by Thomas Sebeok and Marcel Danesi's "modeling systems theory," which studies how a primary sense can become extended in secondary and then tertiary ways).⁸

While the body of Thomas's article is devoted to distinguishing the three spiritual senses—the allegorical sense: "the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law" (C1);⁹ the tropological or moral sense: "the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do" (C2);¹⁰ and the anagogical sense: "what relates to eternal glory" (C3)¹¹—at the end of the *corpus* of his response, Thomas notes that "even according to the *literal* sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses" (emphasis mine).¹²

The multiple literal senses are distinguished in the replies to objections two and three: history is “whenever anything is simply related” (A₁);¹³ etiology is “when its cause is assigned” (A₂);¹⁴ analogy is “whenever the truth of one text of Scripture is shown not to contradict the truth of another” (A₃);¹⁵ and parable or metaphor is when “by words things are signified . . . figuratively,”¹⁶ that is, the parabolical sense is “the figure itself” (*ipsa figura*), not “that which is figured” (*id quod est figuratum*).¹⁷ Note that Thomas says the parabolical sense is to be understood as a literal sense: “the parabolical sense is classified under the literal sense.”¹⁸ In other words, a metaphor expresses a literal meaning, albeit *indirectly* (i.e., through the metaphor).

I think that if we study Thomas’s synthesis here of the theological distinctions about Scripture made by others, we can also see how for *Thomas the spiritual senses must be related to the literal*. To wit, the three spiritual senses are generated by further extensions of “connective modeling,” as extensions founded on the literalness of the parabolical sense:¹⁹ that is, (A₁) Historical, (A₂) Etiological, and (A₃) Analogical can by extension²⁰ become (B) Parabolical, which can then in turn be further extended to the spiritual senses, (C₁) Allegorical, (C₂) Tropological or Moral, and (C₃) Anagogical.²¹ To carefully distinguish these multiple senses thus is to emphasize how Thomas connects the literal and the spiritual on the basis of the primacy of the literal:²² that is, the spiritual senses are founded on the literal sense, just as the figurative (*indirectly* literal) senses are founded on the meaning of the *directly* literal sense.

Whether or not my suggested model for classifying the senses meets with approval, some such attempt to discern a rank or order among all the multiple meanings must be made. Thomas says “the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Holy Writ is God, Who by one act comprehends all things by His intellect,”²³ therefore the many spiritual senses are somehow intimately related to the more primary literal senses, by the ordering of the one God who authors the text and unifies it in His one *Logos*.

As Thomas explicitly says, the literal sense simply means (generically) that “words signify things.”²⁴ The spiritual sense is “based on the literal, and presupposes it”;²⁵ it too is signification, but “signification whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification.”²⁶ In other words, the *literal* signifies things, and the *spiritual* signifies things signifying other things. But since we must in principle be able to see Scripture as one sign-system,²⁷ it is worth noting that literal signs and spiritual signs, although distinguishable thus into two broad senses of Scripture, must be somehow both linked; and presumably the metaphorical could be this link, since the literal includes the metaphorical.²⁸

There are multiple senses of Scripture, and all are rooted in the literal,

inasmuch as all are signified by the one letter of the text;²⁹ but *some senses are more primary than others*. As Thomas writes:

The multiplicity of these senses does not produce equivocation or any sort of multifarious confusion, because (as we have said) these senses are not multiplied as if it were the case that one word signifies several things, but rather because the thing signified by a word can itself be a sign of other things. Thus, in Holy Writ, no confusion occurs, since all the senses are founded upon one—namely, the literal—which is the sole basis upon which an argument can be developed, and not by rooting one’s speech solely in allegory, as Augustine points out (*Epis.* 93.8: PL 33, 334).³⁰

Thus the indirectly literal is founded on the directly literal, just as the spiritual is founded on the literal.³¹ For this reason, metaphor has an eminently literal logic that guides it:

Those who do not understand the nature of logic as an anthroposemosis sometimes see logic and metaphor as opposed. But in fact metaphor is the permanent possibility of expanding the field within which logic works, and sometimes even of restructuring that field in order to make advances in knowledge possible, or alternative understandings open to consideration. Logic is the field of deduction above all, but in its abductive phase logic depends especially upon metaphor; and metaphor within language is the permanent possibility of suggesting new ideas even within the garden of conventional understandings.³²

But as the example of Chilton shows, not only is it easy to confuse the relation between the literal and the spiritual, by assuming that they can only be related to one another univocally: for example, when Chilton polemically sets his preferred spiritual interpretation of the passage against other, nonpacifist readings, by retrojecting his univocal spiritual preference into a univocal grammatical reading. *It is also easy to confuse the literal with the literal*. That is, “literal” has many meanings; one generic (“words signify things”)³³ and two specific: the *directly* literal (“whenever anything is simply related,”³⁴ which is what “historical” means,³⁵ since being “simply related”³⁶ means that “words [*directly*] signify things,”³⁷ rather than that “words signify things which [*indirectly*] signify other things,”³⁸ which is how we should rather describe the genus of the spiritual senses), and the *indirectly* literal (i.e., when “words [*indirectly*] signify things”).³⁹

Thus to avoid confusion I would say that “literal” is best reserved to name the genus, and “*directly* literal” or “*indirectly* literal” to name the two species.⁴⁰ Likewise, since as Thomas notes in his reply to objection two, “allegorical” is

sometimes used in a more generic sense (as by Hugh of St. Victor),⁴¹ I would say that “spiritual” is best reserved to name the genus under which “allegory” in its specific sense may be classified⁴² (specifically, “the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law”).⁴³

So now that I have made these distinctions, which I believe are truly Thomistic distinctions,⁴⁴ let me defend my reading of the many senses of Scripture in Genesis 22 against Chilton’s univocal exegesis, organizing my exegesis according to this Thomistic schema, which is able to integrate any good insights that Chilton has, while leaving behind the type of polemics that oppose the literal and the metaphorical (and that think, moreover, that there can only be one relation between the two). For an exegete, this polemical mindset will inevitably distort any attempt to see the many senses of Scripture in their balanced and ordered harmony.

THE MANY SENSES OF SCRIPTURE IN GENESIS 22

Beginning with the directly literal senses, I note first that the historical sense (A₁) is Scripture’s recounting of the events of the Aqedah, the binding of Isaac. Second, the etiology of the passage (A₂) concerns the establishment of worship, as is evident in the synecdoche of the mount standing for Temple worship, in the etiology of the place name in Gen. 22:14. Thomas observes, in his Treatise on Law in the *Summa Theologiae*, that

for the first time the temple was built in the place which Abraham, instructed by God, had chosen for the purpose of sacrifice. For it is written (Gen. 22:2) that the Lord commanded Abraham to “offer” his son “for a holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will show thee”: and it is related further on (Gen. 22:14) that “he calleth the name of that place, The Lord seeth,” (*appellavit nomen illius loci, Dominus videt*) as though, according to the Divine prevision, that place were chosen for the worship of God (*quasi secundum Dei praevisionem esset locus ille electus ad cultum divinum*). Hence it is written (Deut. 12:5–6): “You shall come to the place which the Lord your God shall choose . . . and you shall offer . . . your holocausts and victims.”⁴⁵

But this external establishment of a place for worship also involves an internal education that entails a third significance of the text here. That is, a third thing may be distinguished from both the history of the Aqedah and the etiology of the name of the place of worship. This is the analogical sense of the passage (A₃), whereby its literal, historical reading may be defended from charges of

contradiction. Genesis 22 seems to present a vivid example of a God contradicting himself in Scripture: now he orders a murder, now he reverses himself; either way, his behavior is irrational and capricious, acceptable only to a worship of unquestioning, blind faith. Admittedly, God is testing Abraham; but does not the test result in a less-than-flattering portrayal of a tyrannical God, a portrait that contradicts more flattering ones elsewhere in Scripture? Yet Chilton notes:

God has good reason to doubt the man he is trying. Within the book of Genesis by this stage, Abraham is not the noble figure of later tradition, but the subject of testing because his actions and their motivations have become suspect. They are dubious within the presentation of Genesis itself, not merely from a modern perspective. Men by the time Genesis was written were not supposed to pimp their pregnant wives, desert their children and their children's mothers, or enter into covenantal relationship with human rulers and their divinities rather than God. . . .

He is not a Kierkegaardian "knight of faith" at all. He is a brute, and everything about his brutish behavior toward his family—by this point an evident theme in Genesis—emphasizes by contrast God's compassionate intervention. It is God who "saw" in the ram a way out of the dilemma posed by Abraham's character, and God who "was seen" by Abraham, so that the patriarch in the end spares his son's life.⁴⁶

In other words, God is not a cruel tyrant but an educator, carefully calibrating his lesson so that a specific character type may learn it. Note that Chilton is able to appeal to the literal, historical sense of other passages of Scripture in Genesis to show that "the truth of one text of Scripture is shown not to contradict the truth of another"⁴⁷ on the basis of that historical sense. This is an exercise in reading the third, "analogical" sense of the passage. "Capricious tyrant" is the wrong analogy for reading the historical sense here; "educator of the inner man" is the right analogy.

Note how a better analogy always allows one to debunk tendentious arguments about what the text "literally" says. A text never says only one thing univocally with mathematical precision. *A text always has literally more than one meaning.* As Thomas notes, "even according to the literal sense, one word in Holy Writ should have several senses."⁴⁸ And historical accounts may literally be read many ways: for example, God as tyrant; God as loving. But it is the analogical reading that makes the appropriate distinctions to unify all Scriptural portrayals, for example, of God, so that the overall portrait is noncontradictory. As Chilton shows,⁴⁹ in his not-so-polemical moods, he is capable of such valuable clarifications. The deepest analogical insight that I believe we can make across the amplitude of Scripture here, I think, is that God is educating brutish

humanity to move from human sacrifice to animal sacrifice. He is establishing worship that is more pleasing to him than that practiced elsewhere. God is not contradictory, but rather educating humanity in what *true worship* means, a slow process in which this is a significantly marked transition: animal sacrifice is substituted for human sacrifice.⁵⁰

Further, to my mind, Chilton's most helpful clarifications concern the metaphorical role of "seeing" in the passage. By distinguishing these metaphors, we may note not only the "parabohical" senses of the Scripture here, but also how the parabohical senses open up the spiritual senses to us (because the indirectly literal *metaphor* is even less univocally focused than directly literal *analogy*).⁵¹ Chilton writes:

As the events are presented in Genesis, the underlying insight that prevents the slaughter is God's first; Yahweh "Saw" before Abraham did, prevented the sacrifice of Isaac by means of an angel, and showed the ram to the patriarch. The momentum of the story pivots on the act of seeing by God and by Abraham, and then moves in a completely different direction from how it set out at the start.⁵²

Obviously God's vision is intellectual, whereas Abraham's is sensory. Abraham is educated through the senses, in order to catch a glimpse of God's providence, namely, how God has conceived of how he will *literally* (A), that is, historically (A₁), interact with Abraham, to (A₂) establish the place for true worship, while (A₃) educating Abraham in that to which true worship points, namely, God himself, so that Abraham and his spiritual children may *metaphorically* "see" (B), that is, "understand," what God plans for them in advance.⁵³

Next, in considering three senses of "seeing" (B₁–B₃), we may come to appreciate how the metaphorical sense stands suggestively in between the directly literal senses (A₁–A₃, the meanings we have just mentioned) and the three (C₁–C₃) spiritual senses.⁵⁴ We turn now to examine how the parabohical sense (B) of "seeing" may act as a threefold basis (B₁–B₃) for the extension of signification into the spiritual senses (C₁–C₃).⁵⁵

THE MANY SENSES OF SCRIPTURE AND THE VULGATE TRANSLATIONS OF GENESIS 22

The Latin Vulgate translates: *Deus providebit*, "God will provide" (Gen. 22:8).⁵⁶ Now, God's foresight may be distinguished in three senses, somewhat like the Latin dictionary's discussion of the verb *provideo*: (B₁) seeing before, either

spatially or temporally; (B2) seeing to something; (B3) caring for someone.⁵⁷ We may relate these to the three spiritual senses, which extend their meaning. First, (C1) the allegorical sense: God sees before himself, in the spatio-temporal order of creation, *the spiritual significance* of various sacrificial victims, human and animal. These victims *suffer*. All of this prefigures and points to the sacrificial suffering of Christ (for “the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law”).⁵⁸ Second, (C2) the tropological sense: God, seeing this suffering (for example, of a son bound—metaphorically, in the spiritual parabolic sense—by the sinful character of his father), acts to make a merciful intervention. There will be mercy, because God *sees to it*. And mercy is the thing “done in Christ” above all, the type “of what we ought to do.” Third, (C3) the anagogical sense: God *cares for us*, like a father for his son. As Isaac was spared death, so too will we rise from our suffering and death, “to eternal glory,” for the heavenly worship of our loving father who, unlike Abraham, saw in advance (A1) the bondage of sin, (A2) our need for true worship, (A3) our need to be educated, (A) through the senses, in a historical process, (C1) educated in the spiritual significance of sacrificial suffering, (C2) so that we may see to the business, like our Father, of making merciful interventions, (C3) able to live thus in the hope of the resurrection. Clearly all these many senses can be seen as signified by the one text.⁵⁹

Moreover, it is worth contemplating the interrelation of the literal and spiritual senses. Here (A1) the history of the Aqedah of Isaac prefigures, via allegory, (C1) the sacrifice of Christ. Also, (A2) the etiological establishment of true worship with Israel points to (C3) the anagogical fulfillment of it in the eternal glory of the resurrection, in our heavenly worship. That is, Isaac’s rescue prefigures our resurrection in Christ, the lamb who took our place. Finally, (A3) the education of Abraham’s inner man in the ways of God’s mercy prefigures (C2) both our coming to an understanding of *Christ’s merciful intervention*, for he died to spare us the wages of sin, and also our coming to understand God’s calling *for us to make merciful interventions*, the sort of true worship he finds most pleasing, as in Christ’s love for us. All of this may be found in the parabolic extension (B) that extends the literal sense and that in turn will found the even more extended spiritual sense; namely, the metaphor of seeing: (B3) God sees the victim bound on Moriah for sacrifice (Gen. 22:14a), *Dominus videt*; (B1) God fore-sees his own victim, the substitution for Isaac that allegorically prefigures Christ (Gen. 22:8), *Deus providebit*; and (B2) God sees to (A1) his historical mission of mercy (A3) by educating us internally through Christ (*Dominus videbit*)⁶⁰ so that we may (C2) imitate him in merciful interventions (Gen. 22:14b), in which *Dominus videtur*.⁶¹ *Mercy*: concerning which, both (B2) God providentially sees *to it*, that is, to mercy (*videbit*),⁶² and (C2) God is also

seen *in it*, in His mercy, that is, God is seen appearing (*videtur*). Note that the Nova Vulgata's more critical rendition matches the Septuagint, the spiritual sense of which is that God, by acting in history, is revealed in his mercy.

In his book, Chilton chooses to emphasize, in the Aqedah, sense (C₂), the moral sense of Scripture (which calls attention to God's *merciful* providence), but he does so far too polemically, in a way that detracts from (C₃) the anagogical sense (our future hope) and also in a way that excessively literalizes (C₁) the allegorical sense (all sacrifice is denounced in this-worldly terms, that is, as historical evil). Chilton's moralizing about mercy becomes too tendentiously pacifist and this-worldly (as if Christ today demands no self-sacrifices of mercy from his followers).⁶⁵ Chilton simply stands athwart history and shouts, "Stop!" because he cannot stomach the parade of violence. He is sentimental, even Gnostic, about the extent to which Christians are implicated in the bloody drama of history. He writes:

Because "Yahweh Saw" both a better victim, the ram, and the dedication of Abraham, he tells Abraham without ambiguity that he is definitively to cease *all sacrificial action* in relation to Isaac. The test is categorically over, never to be repeated: "do not do anything to him." Yahweh's insight is so clearly conveyed to Abraham that it can be said—as the Hebrew wording explicitly states—that Yahweh "was seen" on Moriah.⁶⁴

True, but it is a stretch from there to insist that Christians themselves are to "cease *all sacrificial action*" in history.⁶⁵ For, as even René Girard, that noted critic of "sacrificial Christianity," has himself recognized, it is self-sacrifice that is "the noblest possible form of conduct."⁶⁶

Chilton's taste, however, seems to be for the Septuagint's aorist tenses used in Gen. 22:14: "Yahweh saw" (κύριος εἶδεν), "Yahweh was seen" (ἐν τῷ ὄρει κύριος ὤφθη), as if the story of the sacrificial drama is now over and all that is left for us to do is moralize with Chilton for history to stop. In a sense, we do have this anagogical hope for the redemption of history's bloody sufferings: that is in fact what is always indicated by (C₃), the anagogical sense. But I do not think our mission of mercy (C₂, the moral sense) is easily reduced to Chilton's one-note sermonizing. I would prefer to note rather that those Septuagint aorists are better seen as *gnomic aorists*. That is, the Nova Vulgata's present tenses in 22:14 (*Dominus videt, Dominus videtur*) are telling a past story now vividly in the "historical present," that is, *making its wisdom available gnomically*, because the lesson of the Aqedah is not over in the past but one being learned by every believer who prays, *Deus providebit*: God will provide⁶⁷ (even if it is difficult

to see *how* amidst violent circumstance), because God sees (*Deus videt*)⁶⁸ and always will see (*videbit*),⁶⁹ and He will—indeed, He does—actually appear (*videtur*).⁷⁰

CONCLUSION: SEVEN TRANSLATIONS FOR SEVEN SENSES

In summary, I say that, by making my Thomistic (and semiotic) distinctions,⁷¹ I have defended the RSV's reading "it shall be provided" against Chilton, because in addition to the problem of the "literally"⁷² correct sense of Genesis 22 (i.e., in the sense of the correct grammatical interpretation of the assertion being made in Hebrew about *history* in Gen. 22:14), there are also five other distinguishable literal senses in this text (which we have distinguished as A2–A3, B1–B3), not to mention the problem of a *spiritually* correct reading of the spiritual senses (C1–C3). This I may recapitulate by a final review of the seven different meanings of "it" in "it shall be provided," "it" being *what is seen* as the LORD providentially *sees to it* with care:⁷³ (A1) historically, the ram; (A2) etiologically, the place for true worship named *Yahweh-yireh*; (A3) analogically, the education of humanity in true worship, from human to animal sacrifice; (B) parabolically, insight into the providence of God opened up by the text's figurations of (B1) his intelligent forethought, (B2) active willing within ("seeing to") history, and (B3) purposive loving care; (C1) allegorically, Christ as the suffering victim who takes our place; (C2) tropologically, mercy, of which Christ is the exemplar; (C3) anagogically, the resurrection, our Isaac-like rescue from death to be with our father.⁷⁴

Make of this what you will, but I offer it in the spirit of Pope Benedict XVI,⁷⁵ who spoke in Paris, at the Collège des Bernardins, on September 12, 2008, and to whom I will give my concluding words:

Scripture requires exegesis, and it requires the context of the community in which it came to birth and in which it is lived. This is where its unity is to be found, and here too its unifying meaning is opened up. To put it yet another way: there are dimensions of meaning in the word and in words which only come to light within the living community of this history-generating word. Through the growing realization of the different layers of meaning, the word is not devalued, but in fact appears in its full grandeur and dignity. Therefore the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can rightly say that Christianity does not simply represent a religion of the book in the classical sense (cf. par. 108). It perceives in the words the word, the *Logos* itself, which spreads its mystery through this multiplicity. This particular structure of the Bible issues a constantly new challenge to every generation. It excludes by its nature everything

that today is known as fundamentalism. In effect, the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a transcending and a process of understanding, led by the inner movement of the whole and hence it also has to become a process of living. Only within the dynamic unity of the whole are the many books one book. God's word and action in the world are only revealed in the word and history of human beings.⁷⁶

NOTES

1. In a footnote, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) provides the alternative, "he will be seen." The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) text is the same as that of the RSV, but in a footnote the alternative is "he shall be seen." The Masoretic Text (MT) reads: **יְהוָה יִרְאֶה בְּהוֹרֵר**.
2. Bruce Chilton, *Abraham's Curse* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 199.
3. Ibid.
4. Most often quoted from Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1330), *PL* XCIII, 28D: *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria; Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*. Cf. Augustine of Dacia, *Rotulus Pugillaris I* (1260), ed. A. Walz, *Angelicum 6* (1929); cf. also *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #118.
5. Cf. Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 51–55.
6. Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, 199.
7. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *S.T.*), I, 1, 10, *Corpus Thomisticum* (ed. Enrique Alarcón; Textum Leoninum Romae 1888), from which the Latin in the notes below is quoted; the English translation quoted is the standard translation by the Fathers of the Dominican Province, 1920, except where noted.
8. Thomas Sebeok and Marcel Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning: Modeling Systems Theory and Semiotic Analysis* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000).
9. *Secundum ergo quod ea quae sunt veteris legis, significant ea quae sunt novae legis, est sensus allegoricus* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, c).
10. *secundum vero quod ea quae in Christo sunt facta, vel in his quae Christum significant, sunt signa eorum quae nos agere debemus, est sensus moralis* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, c).
11. *prout vero significant ea quae sunt in aeterna gloria, est sensus anagogicus* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, c).
12. *si etiam secundum litteralem sensum in una littera Scripturae plures sint sensus* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, c).
13. *Nam historia est, ut ipse Augustinus exponit, cum simpliciter aliquid proponitur* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, ad 2).
14. *aetiologia vero, cum causa dicti assignatur* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, ad 2).
15. *analogia vero est, cum veritas unius Scripturae ostenditur veritati alterius non repugnare* (*S.T.*,

- I, 1, 10, ad 2).
16. *sensus parabolicus sub litterali continetur, nam per voces significatur aliquid proprie, et aliquid figurative* (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 3).
 17. “The literal sense” is “that which is figured”: *nec est litteralis sensus ipsa figura, sed id quod est figuratum* (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 3).
 18. *sensus parabolicus sub litterali continetur* (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 3).
 19. Cf. Sebeok and Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning*, 37–43, 71–81, 112–119, 150–157.
 20. Cf. *ibid.*, 92–95.
 21. See Table 1 above.
 22. Cf. Nicholas of Lyra (PL XCIII, 29A): *Scriptura exterior est sensus litteralis, qui est patentior, quia per voces immediate significatur: scriptura autem interior est sensus mysticus, vel spiritualis, qui est latentior, quia per res significatas vocibus designatur.*
 23. *vero sensus litteralis est, quem auctor intendit, auctor autem sacrae Scripturae Deus est, qui omnia simul suo intellectu comprehendit* (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).
 24. *voces significant res* (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).
 25. *qui super litteralem fundatur, et eum supponit* (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).
 26. *Illa vero significatio qua res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant, dicitur sensus spiritualis* (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).
 27. Cf. Benedict Ashley, “Catholicism as a Sign System: Three Religious Languages,” *American Journal of Semiotics* 10 (1993): 67–84.
 28. Cf. John Deely, “The Literal and the Metaphorical and the Price of Semiotics: An Essay on Philosophy of Language and the Doctrine of Signs,” *Semiotica* 161, (Aug 2006): 9–74, esp. 50–51: “‘Literal’ and ‘metaphorical,’ therefore, are not adversative but contrastive terms, *the former* emphasizing the attempt to critically control language, especially (but not only) in relation to the extralinguistic aspects of objectivity for which we seek to give an intellectual interpretation and understanding in terms of causes, *the latter* emphasizing the atmosphere of anthroposemiosis (its ‘signosphere’) upon which the intellectual manipulation of symbols constantly depends for whatever partial success it achieves and which guarantees that the imagery and customs attaching to a public deployment of discourse will never and can never be one hundred percent the same for any two linguistic animals (for within anthroposemiosis there is always the individual semiosis here and now).”
 29. Cf. *ibid.*, esp. 37–53. Deely remarks on the way in which to speak of a “literal” sense is a misnomer: “‘Literally’ means no more than this: that a given assemblage of characters through some original stipulations cemented by custom have come to have the force of standing for some definite object or objects rather than others within the framework of conventions constitutive of linguistic usage within a given historical community. In short, ‘literal meaning’ is a stipulated meaning, virtual or actual, that has achieved social success, the best mark of which in present times is entry within a dictionary” (*ibid.*, 47). Note that this is not to be confused with a conventionalist view of language, since Deely agrees with Sebeok and Danesi (not to mention Aquinas) that meaning is founded in sense experience by the primary modeling system: cf. Sebeok and Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning*, 42, 47–52, 72, 174–77; and John Deely, “The Primary Modeling System in Animals,” in *La filosofia del linguaggio*

- come arte dell'ascolto: sulla ricerca scientifica di Augusto Ponzio*, ed. Susan Petrilli (Bari, Italy: Edizione dal Sud, 2007), 161–79.
30. *multiplicitas horum sensuum non facit aequivocationem, aut aliam speciem multiplicatis, quia, sicut iam dictum est, sensus isti non multiplicantur propter hoc quod una vox multa significet; sed quia ipsae res significatae per voces, aliarum rerum possunt esse signa. Et ita etiam nulla confusio sequitur in sacra Scriptura, cum omnes sensus fundentur super unum, scilicet litteralem; ex quo solo potest trahi argumentum, non autem ex his quae secundum allegoriam dicuntur, ut dicit Augustinus in epistola contra Vincentium Donatistam (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 1).* English translation mine.
 31. *Ibid.* Cf. Sebeok and Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning*, 11–12, 167–69, on “the principle of extensionality.”
 32. Deely, “The Literal and the Metaphorical,” 51.
 33. *voces significant res (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).*
 34. *cum simpliciter aliquid proponitur (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 2).*
 35. *historia est, ut ipse Augustinus exponit (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 2).*
 36. *simpliciter . . . proponitur (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 2).*
 37. *voces significant res (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).*
 38. *res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).*
 39. *voces significant res (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).*
 40. See Table 1 above, where the genus “literal” must be understood as the sum total of both (A) and (B), whereas the species “directly literal” is marked with the letter (A), and the species “indirectly literal” is marked with the letter (B); their respective subspecies are marked as A1–A3, and B1–B3. The genus “spiritual” is specified as C1–C3. Note that Table 1 is not to be read as presenting an exclusionary, tripartite division between (A), (B), and (C); rather, it is intended to suggest how secondary and tertiary modeling must unavoidably establish extended meanings on the basis of the “directly literal” root sense of the primary modeling system, by means of “the principle of extensionality”: cf. Sebeok and Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning*, 11–12, 167–69.
 41. *Sola autem allegoria, inter illa quatuor, pro tribus spiritualibus sensibus ponitur. Sicut et Hugo de sancto Victore sub sensu allegorico etiam anagogicum comprehendit, ponens in tertio suarum sententiarum solum tres sensus, scilicet historicum, allegoricum et tropologicum (S.T., I, 1, 10, ad 2).*
 42. See Table 1 above, where the genus “spiritual” is marked with the letter (C) and the species “allegorical” as C1. Thus the genus “spiritual” also includes the species C2 and C3.
 43. *Secundum ergo quod ea quae sunt veteris legis, significant ea quae sunt novae legis, est sensus allegoricus (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).*
 44. While taking my departure from (and adhering to) Thomas’s distinctions, I admit that I have here (in Table 1) organized them in a novel way, inspired in my own way by Sebeok and Danesi’s “modeling systems theory.” For the purposes of this article, a reader need not take this order as anything more than a convenient arrangement that I have stipulated at the outset, for the sake of organizing the presentation of my later exposition.
But I do intend it also to suggest and exhibit the inner logic of the structure of the distinctions that Thomas made. I believe “modeling systems theory” can help

us understand this inner logic, whether or not Thomas himself recognized or could recognize it as such. My deeper intent is thus twofold: both to refine Thomistic thought in accordance with contemporary intellectual breakthroughs, and yet not to waver from what Thomas learned above all from Augustine, namely, to ground the spiritual sense in the literal sense (cf. *S.T.*, I, 1, 10, ad 1): on the latter point, see also Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2008), and my review of it in *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, April 11, 2009), F13.

Finally, anything that I have set forth in this entire communication should be read and understood in light of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965, which outlines the understanding of Scripture to which I myself most deeply adhere.

45. *S.T.*, I–II, 102, 4, ad 2.
46. Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, 202–3.
47. *analogia vero est, cum veritas unius Scripturae ostenditur veritati alterius non repugnare* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, ad 2).
48. *si etiam secundum litteralem sensum in una littera Scripturae plures sint sensus* (*S.T.*, I, 1, 10, c).
49. Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, 202–3.
50. Cf. René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion: Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 203.
51. Recall that “analogy” is found in Table 1 as (A₃), whereas “metaphor” is anything under (B), i.e., B₁–B₃. Cf. Benedict Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom* (South Bend, IL: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), 285–86:

For the sake of precision every science develops a technical terminology. It may succeed in establishing *univocal* terms, that is, terms that have one, unambiguous meaning, instead of equivocal or ambiguous terms with more than one accepted meaning. A glance at a dictionary will show that most words have several definitions and are thus equivocal. . . .

When a word is used in more than one unrelated senses it is *pure equivocation*. Thus, for example, according to a dictionary, the written word “grate” has the unrelated meanings of “to rub two things together” and “a frame of metal bars.” Moreover the spoken words “grate” and “great” are the same in sound, but their meanings are entirely unrelated. Such pure equivocations in a language arise simply from chance and are of little significance for critical thought. Since we come to know new things through more common experiences, human language tends to give new meanings to words based on the relation of something better known to something less well known. The Greeks called words used in this derivative manner *metaphors* (Greek for “transferred”) and today the term “metaphor” is often used in this very broad sense for any equivocation that is less ambiguous than *pure equivocation*. In this broad sense, however, it can be distinguished into two types: *metaphor* (in a narrow sense) and *analogy*.

The *metaphorical* use of a word gives its several but *related* or *similar* senses without concern for the precise kind of relation or similarity between them, so that this relation is sometimes quite as vague as when an adolescent uses the term “cool” for both a kind of music and a kind of haircut. While this is sometimes due to linguistic carelessness or lack of an adult vocabulary, metaphor can be purposeful. Thus Aristotle noted that a good poet is one who uses metaphorical language so as to stimulate the imagination to relate

images and concepts in new and interesting ways through unexpected resemblances. . . . Similar to a metaphor is a *symbol* which can be not only a word, but also an object or an action, and is characterized by the richness of the many images and ideas it arouses (polyvalency).

Aristotle used the Greek term *analogia* in the ontological sense and not with regard to linguistic usage for which he uses other terms. The Latins, including Aquinas, however, distinguished analogy from metaphor, but in many cases this distinction is not very clear. Analogy more closely approximates univocity, just as metaphor in the narrow sense approaches pure equivocity, because analogies are based on more precise relations between the different senses of a word than is metaphor. This is why so much confusion has arisen between linguistic and ontological analogy, since when words are used analogically in critical thought it becomes necessary to define more precisely the nature of the real (ontological) relations between diverse things to which a common name is given.

52. Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, 198–99.
53. See Table 1 above, for the *directly* literal senses A1–A3, and the *indirectly* literal sense (B).
54. See Table 1 above, for the spiritual senses C1–C3.
55. See Table 1 above, for the metaphorical (i.e., indirectly literal) senses B1–B3.
56. Gen. 22:8, in both Jerome's Vulgate and in the Nova Vulgata.
57. Cf. *A Latin Dictionary, founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary, revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten by Charlton T. Lewis, Ph.D. and Charles Short, LL.D.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), and Table 1 above, senses B1–B3.
58. *Secundum ergo quod ea quae sunt veteris legis, significant ea quae sunt novae legis, est sensus allegoricus* (S.T., I, 1, 10, c).
59. See Table 1 above for the summary presentation of them as A1–A3, B1–B3, and C1–C3.
60. *Dominus videbit* is St. Jerome's rendering of Gen 22:14b in his Vulgate.
61. *Dominus videtur* is the Nova Vulgata's rendering of Gen 22:14b, revising St. Jerome.
62. Note Jerome's very nice echo here, with *videbit* in 22:14b, of *Deus providebit* in 22:8.
63. Cf. René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 235–36.
64. Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, 199.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Girard, *Things Hidden*, 236. Cf. "Blessings and Blood," Review of Chilton, *Abraham's Curse*, in *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto, February 23, 2008), D8.
67. Gen. 22:8, in both Jerome's Vulgate and in the Nova Vulgata.
68. Gen 22:14a, in both Jerome's Vulgate and in the Nova Vulgata.
69. Gen. 22:14b (Jerome).
70. Gen. 22:14b (Nova Vulgata).
71. See Table 1 above for the seven senses named by Thomas: viz., A1–A3, B, and C1–C3. Inspired by Genesis 22, and by reading Sebeok and Danesi (*The Forms of Meaning*), I have

distinguished and added B1–B3. That my attempt at developing a “semiotic Thomism” along such lines is not without illustrious precedent may be verified by consulting Benedict Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*, 51–52, 296–97.

72. Cf. Deely, “The Literal and the Metaphorical,” 47:

Proponents of metaphor can point out with relish that, if we are to speak literally, there is no such thing as a literal meaning of words, no meaning expressed “in or by the letters of the alphabet” as arranged in a given word. Take the word “chair.” What, according to its five letters separately or distinctly considered, is its meaning? Yet the “native speaker” of English has no trouble recognizing that the character string thus assembled, “chair,” means a separate seat for one person usually having a back and four legs, although many variations are possible. . . . Proponents of metaphor like to claim an originally metaphorical origin for all words, and cite etymological litanies in support of the point. Yet argument in this vein quite misses the more fundamental point that all language, in the species—specifically human sense, involves exaptation in the form of stipulation (a *signum ad placitum*)—a stipulation which may or may not succeed in establishing an objective code, moreover, but which, if it does succeed, does so by precisely engendering a convention of wider or narrower scope, depending on the degree of success.

73. The perceptive reader will have noted that the seven translations of Gen. 22:14b quoted at the beginning of this article may be read to correspond with the seven Thomistic senses of Scripture listed in Table 1 above: viz., (A₁) NETS, (A₂) RSV, (A₃) KJV, (B) NAB, (C₁) LXX, (C₂) Nova Vulgata, (C₃) St. Jerome’s Vulgate. Bible versions used in this article include: the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the King James Version (KJV), the New American Bible (NAB), Rahlfs’ 1935 edition of the Septuagint (LXX), the Vatican’s 1986 second edition of the Neo-Vulgata (Nova Vulgata), and the fifth edition of the Stuttgart Vulgate (St. Jerome’s Vulgate).
74. See Table 1 above for the seven senses named by Thomas (A₁–A₃, B, and C₁–C₃), which visually suggests that the three variations in Genesis 22 on the fourth sense (B1–B3) not only extend the literal sense but also lay a foundation for the extension of the literal sense into the various spiritual senses. It is beyond my scope here to discuss the details of such extensionality according to “modeling systems theory,” but the semiotic framework for such an analysis may be found in Sebeok and Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning*; cf. esp. 158–71.
75. An early version of this article was delivered as a paper, “‘On the Mount Yahweh Was Seen’: Greek and Latin Hermeneutics of Genesis 22,” at the Trinity Western University Septuagint Institute Conference, “Septuagint Translation(s): Retrospect and Prospect,” in Northwest Auditorium on September 19, 2008. I thank Larry Perkins, Rob Hiebert, and Dirk Büchner for comments on that early version. I especially thank an anonymous referee for *Contagion* for strikingly perceptive comments and invaluable feedback that helped me refine the final draft of my discussion, especially in section two above on Thomas Aquinas.
76. Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to France on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Lourdes (September 12–15, 2008), Meeting with Representatives from the World of Culture, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Collège des Bernardins, Paris, Friday, 12 September 2008, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-cultura_en.html (accessed September 12, 2001).

